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STATE FOR AF/E AND ACTING A/S CARTER  
STATE ALSO FOR POL/MIL FO AND S/ES-O

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/07/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EWWT](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [PTER](#) [SO](#)  
SUBJECT: SOMALIA - 19 AMCITS ON BOARD PIRATED SHIP

Classified By: Somaia Unit Counselor Robert Patterson for reasons 1.4(b)  
) and (d)

¶1. (S/NF) At approximately 0713 local time April 8 (0013 EST) suspected Somali pirates hijacked the U.S.-flagged cargo container ship Maersk Alabama with 19 American citizens on board, according to the U.S. Navy. The attack took place 260 nautical miles (nm) southeast of the Indian Ocean town of Haradheera. The ship was last reported sailing toward the Somali coast. Ships pirated by Somalis usually sail to one of three Somali coastal towns, Haradherra, Hobyo or Eyl, where the ship and crew are held for ransom, sometimes for months. Recent ransoms for large ships and crew have been in the \$2-4 million dollar range. Crews are rarely harmed. The U.S. Navy reports the U.S. warship USS Bainbridge and other assets are en route to the freighter's location.

¶2. (S/NF) The Maersk Alabama, based in Norfolk, Virginia, is owned by Maersk Line, Limited, a U.S. registered company. Its cargo is as yet unknown, though recent cargos have included food aid for East Africa, according to the U.S. Navy. The Department of Defense reportedly does not/not have cargo on board.

¶3. (S/NF) The pirates' pursuit of the Maersk Alabama began on April 7. The Navy reports the Maersk Alabama was first approached at at 1442L (0745 EST) April 7 by three skiffs launched from an unseen, likely mother ship 8 nms away. The freighter took evasive action, including use of its high pressure fire hoses. After 40 minutes the skiffs broke off their initial pursuit, though the mother ship probably recovered its skiffs and continued to shadow the freighter. At 0713L (0013 EST) April 8, two fast moving skiffs again threateningly approached the ship. Within 20 minutes the freighter reported pirates had boarded it.

¶4. (U) Since April 4 Somali pirates have hijacked at least six ships in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean, reportedly taking advantage of recent calm seas and mother ships to extend their operational reach to as far as 400 nautical miles off the Horn of Africa. In 2008 Somalis pirated approximately 60 ships off the Horn, though the pirates' operational pace has slowed in the first months of 2009, probably due to unfavorable weather, sea states and increase international naval patrols. Pirates are currently holding at least 15 ships off the Somali coast.

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RANNEBERGER